

AUTOMATIC SOUNDTRACK GENERATOR

5 This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Serial No. 09/691,302, filed October 17, 2000, which claims foreign priority based on French Application 99 14420, filed November 17, 1999.

10 Background of the Invention

(a) Field of the Invention

 The current invention relates to an automatic soundtrack generation device that operates
15 to merge a sound track that is independent of an external sound source, while recording or playing back a video sequence.

(b) Description of Related Art

20 Various devices capable of recording or playing video recordings have already been developed, such as digital or analog camcorders and other video recorders. These devices can possess one or several audio inputs which permit mixing or replacement of the sound track that was recorded originally during the recording of the image with an external audio source.

 Furthermore, there also exist various devices that are capable of playing recorded pieces,
25 such as digital compact disc players, players of compressed files (for instance as per the MPEG-level 3 standard), etc.

 Finally, there exist devices that are based on synthesizers of instrumental sounds on which are applied, for instance as per the MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) standard, "scores" of notes that are composed automatically.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention represents an improvement of prior art devices by integrating in a video recorder or player a module that generates music or other sounds which either can be mixed with the originally recorded sound (sound mixing), or can replace the originally recorded sound (sound dubbing). This sound mixing or dubbing can be performed either at video/audio record time or at play time (Figure 1).

The invention disclosed herein envisions selection of musical pieces either out of a library stored, for instance, in the form of digitized musical files (e.g., MP3 or CD music files, etc.), of MIDI files or other types of files; or from pieces that are composed in a pseudo-random fashion using, for instance, the synthesizer function to play original musical pieces.

The invention further envisions selection of musical pieces according to a specified musical style, in a pseudo-random fashion, or according to predefined criteria, wherein the audio files meet the predefined criteria and are either extracted from a music library or are generated by an automatic composition function. The resulting sounds are used either during the video recording or during the video playback.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The above objects and other advantages of the present invention will become more apparent by describing in detail the preferred embodiments of the present invention with reference to the attached drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a system incorporating the present invention.

Figure 2 is a block diagram of one embodiment of the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

The present invention will be described in greater detail with reference to certain preferred and alternative embodiments. As described below, refinements and substitutions of the various embodiments are possible based on the principles and teachings herein.

Figure 1 represents a system in block diagram form showing an external video input 8 providing a signal V1 to a video and sound recording module 10 connected to store the signal V1 on a storage medium 12 such as a tape or a digital memory. The storage medium is connected to a video and sound playback module 14 that produces an output V2 connected to a video output module 15 and an audio output A2 connected to a sound generation module 11. Items 10, 12, 14 and 15 are generally contained in a commonly known camcorder device. The camcorder device also includes an external sound input element 9, such as a microphone, producing an audio output A1. Output A1 is also connected to sound generation module 11. A control module 13, shown connected to items 10, 12, 14 and 11 in Figure 1, selects sounds generated by sound generation module 11 to produce output S2 providing audio output 16.

According to the functional diagram of Figure 2, one embodiment of the invention can typically be represented by a module that generates music or other sounds and which comprises essentially a processor 1, a memory 2 containing the music database of the automatic composition device, a musical synthesizer 4, a memory 3 storing the sound samples for the musical synthesizer, a digital to analog conversion circuit 7, a summation circuit 5 and a memory 6, internal or external to the invention, containing a library of digitized musical files (other alternatives/embodiments of such autocomposition systems may be understood from co-pending U.S. App. Ser. No. 09/691,314 filed on even date herewith for "Interactive Digital Music Recorder and Player," which is hereby incorporated by reference.. The memory elements 2, 3 and 6 can be made of one or several distinct physical components. Processor 1 is able to select, according to certain criteria that are pre-defined or defined by a user, musical files out of the library in memory 6, or is able to compose automatically a melody out of the database stored in memory 2, with an automatic composition algorithm. The output signal S3 of the synthesizer, after digital to analog conversion in converter 7, delivers an analog signal A3 which can optionally be mixed with the recorded audio A2 or with the external audio input A1 in summation circuit 5 to deliver the mixed complete audio signal S1/S2. This mixed audio signal S1/S2, which forms the output of the invention, can then be used as a sound source at video/audio record time (real time) (S1) or at play back time (time shifted) (S2). As a result prerecording of movie soundtracks, for example, is unnecessary. A simple way is provided for a user to change sound content, pitch, etc. for implementation in a video soundtrack.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the processor 1 is made of a microprocessor or microcontroller linked to one or several memories. A RAM memory (volatile memory) can serve as the working memory of the microprocessor, whereas a ROM or EPROM memory can store the microprocessor program and the music database 2 of the automatic composition device.

5 However, a greater flexibility will be granted by non-volatile memories: RAM memory saved by a disposable or rechargeable battery, or Flash EEPROM memory (electrically erasable). The non-volatile memory can be used to store the music database 2 of the automatic composition device and the digitized musical files of the library in sound samples memory 3, as well as the microprocessor program. This permits easy update for the music database and the
10 microprocessor program.

The synthesizer 4 and the microprocessor 1 of Figure 2 cooperate to select banks of sound samples according to predetermined processor instructions to provide the synthesizer output S3. The sound sample banks contain sounds in digital form of predetermined instruments.

The processor 1 can also be used to select the sound source or sources described above.
15 Furthermore, the processor can be used to select commands which permit activation functions such as playing a recording, selecting and mixing an audio source, or controlling any other functions that are commonly found in video recorder based equipment. This combines the functions of blocks 11 and 13 of Figure 1.

Also, it will be understood that the system herein desirably will operate responsive to one
20 or more switch inputs or the like, or to commands entered via a graphical interface such as may be presented, under control of a processor, on an LCD or other display, which may be integral with and/or external to the device. In such a manner, the user may more desirably control the musical output to be recorded or played back, which may include the selection of styles or types of music (e.g., dance, techno, hip-hop, rap or cool, with substyles such as ballad, new age, Latin,
25 etc.), having selections played in accordance with an order specified by user, or by random or pseudo-random selection under control of the processor, etc., as may be desired to generate the desired soundtrack. The present invention also may be used with a virtual radio type of system to provide substitute or additional audio/musical inputs such as for soundtrack generation; reference is made to co-pending U.S. App. Ser. No. 09/690,911 filed on even date herewith for "Virtual
30 Radio," which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Although the invention has been described in conjunction with specific preferred and other embodiments, it is evident that many substitutions, alternatives and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art in light of the foregoing description. Accordingly, the invention is intended to embrace all of the alternatives and variations that fall within the spirit and scope of the appended claims. For example, it should be understood that, in accordance with the various alternative embodiments described herein, various systems, and uses and methods based on such systems, may be obtained. The various refinements and alternative and additional features also described may be combined to provide additional advantageous combinations and the like in accordance with the present invention. Also as will be understood by those skilled in the art based on the foregoing description, various aspects of the preferred embodiments may be used in various subcombinations to achieve at least certain of the benefits and attributes described herein, and such subcombinations also are within the scope of the present invention. All such refinements, enhancements and further uses of the present invention are within the scope of the present invention.